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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 181402Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY OSLO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6753
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0025

C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000217

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2017

TAGS: KJUS PHUM PREL NO CU
SUBJECT: NORWAY INTERESTED IN FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN
HAVANA

Classified By: DCM Kevin M. Johnson for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) During the visit of Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry to Oslo, 11 April, Senior Norwegian MFA officials, including Deputy Director Generals Petter Willie and Johan Vibe, discussed the idea of opening an internet cafe to support dissident access to information. Although they currently have a terminal open for public use at the embassy in Havana, their legal staff has allegedly pressured them to close it as its location on embassy grounds may be a violation of their Vienna Convention commitments. The GON had heard from the GOC that the U.S. was blocking general internet access through sanctions. They were surprised to learn from McCarry that a license for fiber optic backbone access had previously been granted and that the U.S. welcomed Norway's effort to open an internet cafe. They promised to pursue this idea and keep in touch on reactions.

¶2. (C) GON officials also seemed to be interested in finding other areas where they could help to promote freedom of expression. They are interested in prison reform as a related area of concern, and have discussed having Norwegian criminal justice experts and Swiss and Spanish government officials participate in multilateral talks on updating the Cuban judicial code as a first step to improving the justice system and engaging Cuban officials on reducing the number of prisoners. When concern was raised that this might help Havana distract attention from institutionalized abuses, GON officials offered to keep the USG informed so that we can comment on their efforts in the months ahead. NOTE: GON officials appear ready to fall into the GOC trap of labeling problems as technical or resource based in an effort to avoid the larger political discussion or discourse on human rights violations. END NOTE.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: The GON's general line appears to be close to Spain's, looking for an opportunity to open up more to the GOC while not abandoning civil society, or at least preserving some semblance of a claim to not abandoning it. Our (small) opening is to challenge the GON on specific projects which might allow them to contribute to change while not demanding they break with the GOC. The GON is fond of casting itself as a partner for dialogue with countries or groups that the USG has chosen to minimize contact with, and if there are ways to take advantage of this GON interest to improve human rights conditions in Cuba, we should encourage their efforts. END COMMENT

WHITNEY